

(CONFIDENTIAL.)

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,

OTTAWA, DECEMBER 20th, 1878.

*Remarks on the condition of the Half-Breeds of the
North-West Territories.*

The undersigned respectfully submits to the Minister that it is expedient, with as little delay as possible, to deal with the claims to consideration preferred by the Half-Breeds of the North-West Territories.

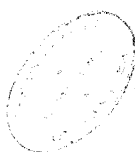
These Half-Breeds are of two classes:—First, the Half-Breeds of the Plains; and Second, those who, while spending part of the year in hunting buffalo, possess settled homes.

The class first alluded to differ but little, excepting in name, from the Indians. They have the tastes, habits, and instincts of the Indian, and the only respect in which they differ from him consists in their occasionally building huts or shanties to winter in. Even these, however, they usually abandon the following spring.

These people are found in bands of a number of families together, and usually frequent the neighbourhood of the Wood Mountains or the Cypress Hills, although other bands are found in certain parts of the Territories. Their only subsistence is the chase; their movements, like the movements of the Indians of the Plains, being principally governed by the migrations of the buffalo, in proximity to the herds of which they are generally to be found, intent upon supplying from these animals the wants of themselves and families in the way of food and clothing.

The second class may be illustrated by reference to those Half-Breeds who are found at Edmonton, St. Albert, St. Ann's, St. Laurent, Victoria, &c., &c., &c., who have habitable—and in some cases good—houses, where they reside and cultivate the soil to a greater or less extent; but still, mainly depend for their means of living upon the buffalo. The subsistence afforded to the Half-Breeds by the buffalo is, of course, intended to imply, in addition to the daily food supply, other necessities of life, such as are obtained from traders in exchange for pemmican and robes.

Some uneasiness is felt by the Half-Breed element in the Territories, in consequence of no steps having yet been taken towards the recognition of the demands put forward on their behalf. It must be freely admitted they have a claim to favourable consideration; and the question is—How is that claim to be satisfied so as to benefit the Half-Breeds, and at the same time, benefit the country? Certainly the experience gained in carrying out the policy adopted in regard to the Half-Breeds of Manitoba—that is: absolute grants of land to the parents and children respectively—has not been such as would justify a similar policy with regard to the Half-Breeds of the North-West Territories. Indeed, it is anything but probable that a proposition of that nature could be again carried in Parliament. What then are we to do for them? They have, as natives, as good a right to the protection of the Government as the Indians, and unfortunately they are very little better able than are the Indians to take care of themselves. It is, therefore, evident that one or other of three courses must be pursued with respect to them:—



1. To treat them as wards of the Government—in effect, make a treaty with them, as with the Indians, and look forward to their remaining for many years in their present semi-barbarous state;

2. To give an absolute issue of scrip, to a reasonable extent, to each individual, and then let them take their chances of living or starving in the future; or

3. To offer them certain inducements to settle on land and learn to farm—especially to raise cattle.

The course first suggested would, in the opinion of the undersigned, be in the interest neither of the Government nor of the Half-Breeds; indeed, it is very doubtful if the latter would consent to it if it were proposed.

The second alternative, if followed, would result in the last state of the recipients of the scrip being worse than the first, for the reason that the Half-Breed, having no idea whatever of thrift, or of the necessity for making provision for the future by locating his scrip and securing the land for the benefit of his family, would, as our experience in Manitoba proves beyond all doubt, sell the scrip for whatever he could get for it, which in most cases would be a mere trifle. The result, therefore, would be, that on the extinction of the buffalo—an occurrence, unfortunately, but a few years in the future—we should find ourselves face to face with a formidable, nomadic, semi-savage element in the population, which, from the fact of not being deprived of its natural means of subsistence, would prove a standing menace to the peace and prosperity of the Territories.

The third course above referred to remains open to the Government to adopt, and the undersigned is of opinion that in following it will be found a satisfactory solution of the difficulty. Whatever might be the result eventually of settling the Half-Breeds on land; or, in other words, whether that policy might or not in the end prove successful—and the undersigned, in view of the effect on the Half-Breed mind of the rapidly-decreasing supply of buffalo, cannot but think that it would be successful—the immediate effect would be, assuming that the Half-Breeds themselves are willing to give it a trial, that we should have the whole of this element in sympathy with the Government in dealing with the plain tribes of Indians. In this way we should attract to our side a moral power, which, in the present critical relations of the various tribes of Indians towards each other and towards the Government, would prove of the greatest value to the Dominion.

As an evidence that the Half-Breeds themselves are favourably disposed towards such a mode of dealing with the question under consideration as is here suggested, it may be stated that during the past season a memorial, purporting to be signed by 272 Half-Breeds of the Cypress Hills, was addressed to the Governor and Council of the North-West Territories, in which the memorialists express their desire to lead a more civilized life, and ask to have a tract of land set apart for them with that view. Their demands, however, are in some respects unreasonable. They ask (1), For a reserve of 150 by 50 miles in extent, which, assuming the population in question to number 2,500 souls, would give an area of five square miles to each man, woman and child; (2), That they should be free of taxes, if not forever, at least until such time as they can pay them without detriment to their families; (3), That they should be provided with school-houses and teachers; (4), That they should also be provided with churches and priests; (5), That they should have instructors sent to teach them the various trades, such as blacksmithing, carpentering, shoemaking, &c.; and (6), That for the first five years they be provided with seeds free of charge.

The Council of the North-West Territories, having given consideration to the memorial, passed the following resolutions respecting the same:—

“That the Lieutenant-Governor be requested to forward the petition to the Dominion Government, together with the following suggestions, which they

"respectfully but strongly urge may receive the early and earnest attention of His Excellency the Governor General in Council :—

"1.—That it would be injudicious to set apart reserves of land for the Half-Breeds of the North-West Territories, or to give them negotiable scrip.

"2.—That in view, however, of the fact that grants of land or issues of scrip were made to the Half-Breeds of Manitoba, towards the extinguishment of the Indian title to the lands of that Province, there will undoubtedly be general dissatisfaction among the Half-Breeds of the said Territories unless they receive some like consideration.

"3.—That this consideration would most tend to the advantage of the Half-Breeds were it given in the form of a non-transferable location ticket for, say, one hundred and sixty acres to each Half-Breed head of a family and each Half-Breed child of parents resident in the said Territories at the time of the transfer thereof to Canada—the ticket to be issued immediately to any Half-Breed eighteen years of age or over, on furnishing evidence of claim, and to every child on arriving at that age on furnishing the necessary evidence.

"4.—That each Half-Breed holding such a location ticket should be allowed to locate it upon any unoccupied Dominion Lands, but the title of the land so entered should remain in the Crown for ten years; and if, at the expiration of three years after such entry, the Half-Breed locatee has made no improvement on the land, his claim thereto shall be subject to forfeiture.

"5.—To induce the Half-Breeds who now procure their livelihood by hunting on the plains to abandon their present mode of life and settle on their locations, by which course it alone appears possible to avert the great destitution with which they are threatened, owing to the imminent early extinction of the buffalo, that aid in agricultural implements and seeds be allowed them for three years, but only once for each family that may settle within that time."

The conclusions arrived at by the Council are, in short, as follows :—

(a). Each Half-Breed should receive non-negotiable scrip for 160 acres of land, which he or she should be at liberty to locate on any vacant Dominion Lands, but no land should be reserved for that purpose, and the patent should not issue for ten years after the selection has been made.

(b). That aid, in the form of implements and seed grain, should be issued to such Half-Breeds to a reasonable extent.

The undersigned is of opinion that encouragement, additional to that recommended by the Council, would be required to induce the Half-Breeds to become settlers; and he fully believes that it would be in the interest of good government in the Territories to grant the same. He would, accordingly, respectfully suggest that the Half-Breeds, where wished for, should be permitted to take up their land in such a way as to enable them to settle together or in bands; and whenever a band of fifty or more families formed themselves into one community or settlement, they should be provided with a school and teacher for a term of years, such teacher to be selected with a view to being able to instruct them in the raising and care of stock, also in practical agriculture, including the use and care of implements.

The undersigned regards the state of affairs in the Territories in relation to the Indians and Half-Breeds as calling for the serious consideration of the Government, in view of additional complications which are not unlikely to arise owing to the presence on our soil of large numbers of armed Indians, refugees, for the time being, from the state of war in the adjoining territory. He is of opinion that further

measures should be adopted to cultivate and maintain relations with our Indian and Half-Breed populations calculated to attach them to us, and to convince them that the Government is desirous of fulfilling its obligations to them in the utmost good faith. In no way could we more advantageously or more certainly effect this important object than by affording facilities for instructing them in farming, cattle raising, and especially in the mechanical trades, thus preparing them to become self-supporting when their present means of subsistence—the buffalo—shall be no longer available, and paving the way for their emancipation from tribal government, and for their final absorption into the general community.

The only way to obtain this desirable result would appear to the undersigned to be by means of industrial schools. Numbers of such institutions have been put into operation by the Government of the United States among its loyal Indians, and with the happiest possible results. It may be stated, too, that although the Indians have shown themselves apt and quick in picking up a knowledge of the use of farm implements, they are specially well adapted to succeed in raising cattle, for which the climate, and abundance of nutritious grasses in the territory, affords every encouragement, moreover they have a natural bent in the direction of mechanical work, in which, with a moderate degree of instruction, they would become proficient. One or two of such schools, established at convenient points in the Territories, where a certain number of young Indians and Half-Breeds, intelligent and willing, selected from the different tribes or bands, would be taught—some practical farming, some the care of stock, and others the various more useful trades—would prove most powerful aids to the Government, both morally and materially, in their efforts to improve the condition of those people, and to gradually lead them to a state of civilization. The expense of such schools would be trifling compared with the value of the results which would be obtained from them. In fact, the opinion of the undersigned is: that in a short time they might, by good management, be rendered to be completely self-sustaining institutions, and he respectfully but strongly recommends the scheme to the favourable consideration of the Minister.

The undersigned respectfully requests for the whole question discussed in this memorandum the early consideration of the Minister of the Interior, in order, if thought desirable, that a measure may be prepared, embodying such policy as may be decided upon, in good time for the ensuing session of Parliament.

All of which is respectfully submitted.

A. S. Dennis
Deputy Minister.

To the Right Honorable

Sir J. A. Macdonald, &c., &c.,
Minister of the Interior.

See Buffalo